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A Catenaccio Game: the 2010 election in Scotland

James Mitchell and Arno Van Der Zwet

At the Scottish Conservative conference following the 1979 general election, Margaret Thatcher thanked the party for its contribution to victory. The Scottish Conservatives had won 31 per cent of the vote, up almost 7% on the previous election. With 22 of Scotland's 71 seats, Mrs Thatcher commended the six new Tory MPs who had gained a seat for the party. But the new Prime Minister was conscious that her party had a long way to go to achieve the level of support it had won in England, 'Is it that our policies are not so popular in Scotland? Of course not,' she asserted.¹ Being in government afforded the Conservatives with the opportunity to pursue popular policies that might allow them to close the gap between their support in Scotland and England.

However, fourteen years later in her memoirs, Mrs Thatcher reflected that there had been 'no Tartan Thatcherite revolution... The balance sheet of Thatcherism in Scotland is a lopsided one: economically positive but politically negative'.² Over the eighteen years in power, the Conservatives lost support in Scotland and ultimately lost all seats north of the border in 1997. The Conservative brand in Scotland had been seriously tarnished. Being in government had created more problems than opportunities. Whatever they did would be presented by opponents as anti-Scottish simply because the Conservatives had so little support in Scotland. Mrs Thatcher's style did not help. There is evidence that many Tory policies were popular in Scotland, most notably council house sales, but paid no electoral dividends.

The diagnosis of Conservative unpopularity in Scotland after 1979 was similar to that offered by a number of senior Tories for the Conservatives' defeat across Britain in 1997. The brand, rather than its policies, was the cause of its problems. In his speech to the Tory conference in 2005, Francis Maude noted that popular policies lost their appeal as soon as they were associated with the Conservative Party. In his booklet, *Smell the Coffee: A Wake-Up Call for the Conservative Party*, Michael Ashcroft argued that the 'Conservative label was undermining its ability to sell its policies' and that many voters 'had such a negative view of the Conservative Party's brand that they would oppose a policy they actually agreed with rather than support a Tory proposal'.³ David Cameron's challenge as leader was to detoxify the brand. He was aided in this in that the main competition's brand was also damaged. In under five years, Cameron reached parts of the UK none of his predecessors since John Major had done.

However, the much vaunted 'Cameron effect' had no impact on Scotland. The Tories' brand problem ran deep north of the border. Annabel Goldie, the party's Holyrood leader, is popular, but has been unable to overcome the deep-rooted unpopularity of her party in Scotland. This problem goes further back than the difficulties Cameron confronted with his detoxification strategy across Britain. Over the thirteen years in Opposition, focus was on winning back support lost in 1997, neglecting the longer-term loss of support in Scotland. Back in government, the Conservatives' Scottish problems have become exposed once more. Whether being in government offers the Conservatives more opportunities than problems will be conditioned in part by the economic and fiscal context. The existence of a Scottish Parliament adds to the mix and might either become a means through which the Government is able to devolve penury,

evading many difficult choices itself or becomes an authoritative voice of opposition to London government. With only one Scottish MP, coalition with the Liberal Democrats, with eleven MPs in Scotland, ensures that on this occasion opposition to the Conservatives will at least be more limited.

A Scottish result

Despite a very British campaign, the outcome of the election in Scotland was quite different from that elsewhere in Britain. No seats changed hands in Scotland (see Table 1).⁴ Labour retained all 40 seats won in 2005, including winning back two seats lost in by-elections during the last Parliament. The Scottish Conservative Party held onto its solitary Scottish seat, but failed to win any of its eleven target seats.⁵ While Labour's vote fell by 6.5% in Wales and by 7.4% in England it rose by 3.1% in Scotland, the first increase in Labour support in Scotland since its landslide in 1997. By contrast, the Conservatives increased their share of the vote by 4.7% in Wales, 3.8% in England and only 0.9% in Scotland. The Scottish National Party (SNP) vote was up 2.3%, although it failed to win any additional seats and fell well short of its target of 20 additional seats to make Westminster 'dance to a Scottish jig'.⁶ The Liberal Democrats' vote fell by 3.7% and dropped behind the SNP to third place in share of the vote while in England the Liberal Democrat vote was up by 1.3%.

1: The 2010 election results in Scotland

	Seats won (change since 2005)	% share of vote (change since 2005)
Labour	41 (+1*)	42.0 (+3.1)
SNP	6 (0)	19.9 (+2.3)
LibDem	11 (0)	18.9 (-3.7)
Conservative	1 (0)	16.7 (+0.9)
Others	0 (-1*)	2.4 (-2.6)

* Speaker's seat

No party has governed Scotland with such a low share of the vote and only one seat. Coalition rather than minority government may have been David Cameron's preference but it looks more like a necessity from a Scottish perspective, offering cover for its poor performance north of the border. But even the combined Conservative and Liberal Democrat share of the vote was 3.9% below that won by the Conservatives in England and 3.2% below Labour's Scottish support. The coalition's twelve Scottish MPs represent predominantly Highland and rural constituencies and East Dumbartonshire is the only seat held by the parties in west central Scotland where the bulk of the population resides. The Liberal Democrats do not offer the Conservatives much Scottish cover.

While the SNP replaced the Liberal Democrats as Scotland's second party in share of the vote, it remained firmly in third place in number of seats and failed to come close to challenging Labour's dominance of Westminster elections north of the border. The SNP's breakthrough three years before in elections to the Scottish Parliament had convinced many in the SNP that it could make a similar breakthrough at Westminster. But the SNP failed to take account of the electorate's willingness to behave differently at Westminster and Holyrood elections. Even in the heat of the election, the electorate's preferences continued to distinguish between Westminster and Holyrood elections.

While Labour and SNP compete as largest part at Holyrood, Labour remains dominant at Westminster.

Though no seats changed hands, 15 new MPs were returned from Scotland, of whom 13 were Labour members. Alex Salmond was replaced as SNP MP for Banff and Buchan by Eilidh Whiteford and Mike Crockart replaced his Liberal Democrat colleagues John Barrett as MP for Edinburgh West. The number of women MPs rose from nine (7%) in 2005 to 13 (13.2 per cent) in 2010, including the youngest MP at 25 years of age. Mohammad Sarwar, Scotland's only Muslim and ethnic minority MP, was replaced by his son in Glasgow Central. While Alex Salmond stood down after 23 years as an MP, two Labour Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) became dual members on election to the House of Commons and two Conservative MSPs stood unsuccessfully. With the elevation of former Labour First Minister Jack McConnell to the House of Lords, there are now two members of the Lords who are also MSPs (both Labour).

A very British election

The 2010 election was a very British affair. There has always been a Scottish dimension to UK general elections. Since 1959, the three main British parties have each produced Scottish manifestos, though these were often little more than the British manifestos with Scottish covers. The Scottish dimension manifested itself in debates on Scotland's constitutional status in elections up to 1997. However, there have been other distinguishing features of elections in Scotland, not the least of which have been the results. In 1979, when the Conservatives last returned to power following a period of Labour Government, the election in Scotland saw the 'temporary eclipse of the Scottish

dimension'.⁷ The 2010 election also appeared to be a very British election in which the Scottish dimension was eclipsed though the result bucked the British trend.

Three aspects of the campaign signified its Britishness: the British leaders' debates; the public policy debate with particular emphasis on the economy and public finances; and the relative absence of much debate on Scotland's constitutional status. The focus on the British leaders' debates had the effect of marginalising any distinctive Scottish dimension. Styled by the BBC as 'Prime Ministerial Debates', the rules for the debates had been agreed between the three main parties and excluded the leaders of the smaller parties, including the SNP. The Prime Ministerial debates not only gave the impression that broadcasters had re-written the constitution as a Presidential system, but a formula was required to deal with issues that were devolved.

Broadcasters had three responses in dealing with devolved issues. First, in hosting the three debates in England (Manchester, Bristol and Birmingham) the broadcasters side-stepped the difficulties of accommodating matters that were devolved by simply focusing on the election as it affected England. Secondly, each time a matter was raised that was devolved to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, the debate moderator noted that the subject was devolved. Alastair Stewart, ITV moderator in the first debate, prefaced a question on law and order, for example, by simply stating that 'I need to point out that it is an area where powers are devolved to the parliament in Scotland and from this week, also the assembly in Northern Ireland'.⁸ This was to be the standard operating procedure during debates for dealing with the broadcasters' equivalent of the West Lothian Question. None of the party leaders felt compelled to engage with the implications of Britain's territorial constitution during the debates. References to

Scotland were almost non-existent. In answer to what he had done personally to tackle climate change, Gordon Brown mentioned the solar panel installed at his North Queensferry home in Scotland. Nick Clegg's nearest comment on Scotland was a reference to MPs who had 'flipped' properties getting away 'scot-free'. Scotland, Scottish and Scots never passed the lips of David Cameron in any of the debates. Thirdly, the broadcasters offered separate Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland debates at other times. In essence, the broadcasters' response to their own West Lothian Question has been much like successive UK Governments until now and to ignore it.

The Prime Ministerial debates attracted considerable public interest beyond England. The first debate attracted high viewing figures across Britain and while there was a lower proportion of viewers in Scotland, the figures watching the three British party leaders' debates were much higher than any of the Scottish leaders' debates. In addition, there was the usual coverage of the election that tended to marginalise the Scottish dimension and smaller parties, including interviews with the three British party leaders. The SNP objected and took their case to the Court of Session in Edinburgh in an attempt to stop the third (BBC) debate being broadcast in Scotland but failed to win its case.⁹ The judge argued that impartiality was not the same as 'giving each and every political party equal coverage' and that the SNP had failed to demonstrate that the BBC had failed to take account of impartiality. She also noted that the SNP had failed to act earlier but had waited until the final debate before issuing its legal challenge and had failed to explain adequately what fairness entailed.¹⁰

**2: Viewing figures for ‘Prime Ministerial’ debates and UK leader interviews:
Scotland and the UK compared**

Channel	Date	Start time	UK Network 000s*	Network TVR %**	Share %***	Scotland 000s	Scotland TVR %	Scotland Share %
ITV1	15/4/10	20:32	9679	17	36	699	15	33
BBC News	22/4/10	20:00	1388	2	5	70	2	3
Sky News		20:00	2212	4	9	148	3	7
BBC1	29/4/10	20:30	7428	13	27	419	9	19
Programme	Date	Start time	Network 000s*	Network TVR**	Share***	Scotland 000s	Scotland TVR	Share
BBC1 Paxman interviews Clegg	12/4/10	20:30	2170	3.81	5	70	2	3
BBC1 Paxman interviews Cameron	23/4/10	20:30	2336	4.1	10.18	180	3.97	9.52
BBC1 Paxman interviews Brown	30/4/10	20:30	2574	4.52	11.19	194	4.28	11.07

*This is average audience across the programme

** This is the % of UK/Scotland population watching the debate – e.g. 17 TVR means 17% of UK population watched the first debate while it was 15% in Scotland.

*** This gives viewing share of all people watching television at the time of the debate e.g. 36% of those watching television tuned into the first debate.

3: Viewing figures for Scottish party leaders debates

Debate	Channel	Date	Start time	000s	TVR %	Share %
Scottish Debates	ITV	22/4/10	21:00	251	6	13
Scottish Leaders' Debate	BBC1	2/5/10	21:58	199	4	9
SKY News Scotland Debate	Sky	25/4/10	10.30	59	1.28	

Part of the SNP's case had been that the 'impact of the previous two debates on the media coverage of the General Election campaign as a whole, has been demonstrably the single largest factor in the current UK General Election campaign in terms of impact on the media profile, approval ratings of party leaders and overall intention to vote' and that the inclusion of Nick Clegg in the previous two debates 'greatly increased the coverage of that party in the media' and 'greatly improved the fortunes of that party in the opinion polls'.¹¹ Polls had indicated a 'Clegg bounce' following the first debate, though Scottish polls suggested that the Liberal Democrats only managed to climb back to the level of support won in 2005 (although up on how they had been doing prior to the debate). Evidence from a YouGov poll conducted before and after the first debate suggests that Liberal Democrat support jumped from 17 to 23% in Scotland and from 21 to 24% after the third poll. The Liberal Democrats appeared to be fighting it out for third place with the Conservatives in Scotland at the start of the campaign in Scotland with Labour pulling well ahead of the SNP in second place. The first debate gave the Liberal Democrats a boost, drawing ahead of the SNP and for much of the remainder of the

campaign appeared likely to retain their position, won in 2005, as Scotland's second party at Westminster.

Table 4: Scottish opinion polls (% vote share)

				Labour	SNP	LibDem	Cons
2005 Election Result				39.5	17.6	22.6	15.8
PUBLICATION	Polling Firm	Sample dates	Sample size				
Scottish Daily Mail	YouGov	24-26/8/09	1,078	33	25	16	19
Scottish Mail on Sunday	YouGov	26-28 Aug 09	1,183	30	26	18	20
Herald	TNS-BMRB	28 Oct – 3 Nov 09	983	39	25	12	18
Telegraph	YouGov	18 Nov – 20 Nov 09	1,141	39	24	12	18
Sunday Times	Ipsos MORI	19 Nov- 23 Nov 09	1,009	32	34	12	15
Herald	TNS-BMRB	27 Jan – 4 Feb 2010	1000	42	26	11	18
Sun	YouGov	15-17 Feb 2010	562	34	24	15	21
Sun	YouGov	17-24 Feb 2010	667	40	23	14	18
Scotsman	YouGov	24-26 Feb 2010	1002	35	24	15	20
Scotland on Sunday	YouGov	24-26 Feb 2010	1002	38	21	15	20
Times	Ipsos MORI	18/2- 21/2/10	1,006	34	32	12	17
Sun	YouGov	24/2-3/3/10	821	39	24	14	18
Sun	YouGov	3-10/3/10	720	39	26	12	18
Sun	YouGov	10-17 March 2010	781	39	24	15	16
Sun	YouGov	17-24 March 2010	885	36	23	13	21
Sun	YouGov	24-31 March 2010	936	39	23	15	21
PoliticsHome	YouGov	4-11 April 2010	1227	38	24	16	17
Scotsman	YouGov	14-16 April 2010		40	20	19	16

Politics Home	YouGov	11-18 April 2010	1,227	39	20	20	17
STV	Ipsos MORI	14-17 April 2010	1,005	36	26	20	14
Sun	YouGov	14-21 April 2010	1,329	36	21	23	15
Sky	YouGov	21-23 April 2010	1,001	36	22	24	15
PoliticsHome	YouGov	18-25 April 2010	1,227	36	21	25	14
Times	Populus	23-26 April 2010	1,000	37	19	24	16
Sun	YouGov	1,121	1,227	36	23	23	14
Scotland on Sunday	YouGov	1,520		37	20	22	17
PoliticsHome	YouGov			37	25	22	14
Scottish Mail on Sunday	TNS BMRB	21-27 April 2010	1,029	44	23	16	13
Scotsman	YouGov	3-5 May 2010	1,507	37	21	22	17
2010 Election Result				41.9	19.9	18.8	16.4

The dominance of the economy and public finances may have had distinctly Scottish dimensions but these did not feature in the main debates. While the Scottish implications of the economic crisis and impact on Holyrood's finances were part of the debate in Scotland, the UK-wide dimension dominated as the economy and decisions on how much money Holyrood would have to spend are matters retained at Westminster. The Scottish dimension appeared to have been marginalised both by the focus on the Prime Ministerial debates but also the policy concerns.

Even though many of the issues debated in UK elections have been the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament since its establishment in 1999, there was little effort to distinguish between matters that were devolved or retained. Indeed, it would have been difficult to mount a British-wide campaign without surrounding many

commitments with devolution caveats. What was significant was that the Scottish manifestos and campaigns largely ignored the fact that MPs would have no direct say in devolved matters. Policies appeared in the Scottish manifestos which would have been more appropriate in manifestos for next year's Holyrood elections. Scottish Labour's manifesto, for example, stated, '...our goal is educational excellence for every child' and describes Labour's 'ambitious programme of school building' from its period in government in Scotland from 1999-2007.¹² Devolved matters were the subject of debates as if these were Holyrood elections. In essence, Holyrood and devolved matters were subsumed within this UK election. There was little effort on the part of the parties or media to attribute responsibility to reflect constitutional realities.

Scotland's constitutional status hardly registered in the election despite the SNP Government's 'National Conversation', a Scottish Government-sponsored debate, on the subject. The SNP Government had proposed a referendum on independence, but lacks a Parliamentary majority at Holyrood. The opposition parties at Holyrood – Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats - had established a Commission under Sir Kenneth Calman to review devolution. It reported in June 2009 recommending minor changes in devolved powers and changes in how Holyrood would be financed. None of the SNP's opponents were keen to discuss the subject during the election and there was the appearance of cross-Unionist consensus around the proposals of the Calman Commission.¹³ Calman had been set up in response to the SNP's electoral success at the Holyrood elections and its success was evident in removing Scotland's constitutional status from the political agenda. This left the SNP alone in struggling to raise the constitutional question.

The most pressing issues in Scotland as elsewhere during the election focused on the economy and public finances, crowding out discussion of Scotland's constitutional status. Although there was a Scottish dimension, the key issue of when spending cuts would occur dominated debates. There was less debate on which services would be cut, given a fair degree of consensus across the three British parties, thereby making the question of where the cuts would be imposed, both in terms of services and territories, less controversial than might otherwise have been the case.

Leaders and leadership

There was even more focus on the party leaders in this election than in the past. However, this was complicated in Scotland, where Alex Salmond, the SNP's leader, is First Minister of the Scottish Government and was standing down as an MP. Angus Robertson, leader of the SNP group at Westminster is hardly a household name in Scotland. A further complication was that Gordon Brown is a Scot and Scottish MP. Given that the Conservatives have suffered from an image as an anti-Scottish or at least English party, David Cameron's leadership might have been seen by many Scots as epitomising an upper class Englishman. Nick Clegg might also have been expected to suffer from a similar image problem north of the border given his background, not least compared to Charles Kennedy who had led the Liberal Democrats in 2005. However, polls suggest that Cameron and Clegg were more popular than their respective parties in Scotland, a situation that had also occurred when John Major had led the Conservatives.

Polls suggest that there was little evidence of a 'Cameron bounce' since his election as Conservative leader in December 2005 though considerable evidence of a

Clegg effect after the first Prime Ministerial debate and a persistent positive Brown effect in Scotland. In February 2010, Clegg's ratings were low compared to other party leaders though this was probably due to his low profile. The Prime Ministerial debates gave him a platform that raised his profile and ensured that his personal ratings soared (see Table 5) but it had far less impact on his party's support. As we saw earlier, Scottish Liberal Democrat support at the time of the third Prime Ministerial debate (29 April) was only around the same level that the party had won in 2005. There was also evidence that Alex Salmond polled well but again this appears to have had little impact. In this case, the electorate may have decided that 2010 was not the year in which their judgment of the First Minister was relevant. Though David Cameron's poll ratings improved during the election in Scotland, his net ratings remained negative. Gordon Brown's ratings proved the mirror of Cameron's in Scotland but also mirrored his ratings in England. While a poll taken at the end of April showed Brown to have a net positive rating of 7 points, his ratings across Britain in a poll conducted around the same time showed a net negative rating of 19 points. Labour in Scotland was keen to make much of Gordon Brown's Scottish roots. As Douglas Alexander said during the campaign, 'I think people are proud of having a Scottish Prime Minister who knows where he is from and where he wants to take the country'.¹⁴ This was a view given prominence in Labour supporting media north of the border where there was often a backlash against harsh criticism of the Prime Minister from other media outlets.

5: Leaders' ratings in Scotland

TV Leaders' Polling in Scotland					
Leader	Total Good	Total bad	Date	Sample	Polling Firm
Gordon Brown	43	35	24-26 th Feb	1002	YouGov
Alex Salmond	36	38			
David Cameron	28	33			
Nick Clegg	26	23			
Gordon Brown	45	38	28 -30 April (last election debate)	1628	YouGov
Alex Salmond	39	34			
David Cameron	32	35			
Nick Clegg	55	14			

Change under the surface

The extent of Labour's success in 2010 was evident in its ability to hold onto or increase its share of the vote across Scotland. Labour's share of the vote fell in only five Labour-held constituencies compared with 2005: Livingston, where Jim Devine, the former Labour MP had been charged with expenses related crimes; Aberdeen South, a Liberal Democrat target seat; Dunfermline and West Fife, won by the Liberal Democrats at a by-election in 2006; Falkirk, where former Labour MP came out in support of the SNP candidate; and Airdrie and Shotts, where former Home Secretary John Reid was standing down and there had been controversy surrounding proposals for an all-women short-list of Labour candidates. However, Labour's vote held up well in seats that might have been expected to record a significant swing against the party including many marginal seats. New candidates replaced incumbents likely to damage Labour due to

embarrassing expenses claims, personal issues and peccadilloes and staved off swings against the party.

Though no seats changed hands, other changes are discernible. As the Liberal Democrats slipped back, their position as second party in share of the vote across Scotland was lost to the SNP, while they held onto second place in number of seats. The SNP moved into second place in ten more seats while Labour and the Conservatives moved into second place in one more seat each. These movements were all achieved at the expense of the Liberal Democrats except in Edinburgh West, held by the Liberal Democrats, where Labour moved ahead of the Conservatives to become second party. In only two of these seats – Edinburgh West and Gordon – is the new second party within less than 10% of the winning party, so that these changes are unlikely to affect who wins at the next election. The SNP has moved into second place in 29 constituencies and its share of the vote rose in 46 of Scotland's 59 constituencies, but it remains well behind Labour and still has a long way to go to have a chance of gaining seats. The Conservatives are in second place in 15 seats with Labour in second in nine and Liberal Democrats in only six.

While the SNP may have become the second party, its best hope of gaining an additional seat is Scotland's twelfth most marginal seat and would require a swing of 5.1%, even larger than was required after 2005. The Liberal Democrats are in second place in the two most marginal seats in Scotland, both in Edinburgh, but Labour is in second in the next two most marginal seats. The picture that emerges is that Labour retains its pre-eminent position while the other three parties fight it out to become

challenger. Labour not only holds 41 seats but does so comfortably. It would take a uniform swing of 10.8% and the loss of former Scottish Secretary Jim Murphy's Renfrewshire East seat before Labour lost its overall majority of seats in Scotland. The SNP would require a uniform swing of almost 10% to get into double figures in number of MPs and a uniform swing of just under 20% to reach the additional 20, the objective Alex Salmond set his party before 2005. The Conservatives would require a swing slightly less than this to get into double figures. Labour's continued dominance of Westminster elections in Scotland looks as assured as can be imagined.

6: Constituencies by marginality

Rank 2005	Rank 2010	Constituency	Winning Party	second place 2005	Swing 2005	second Place 2010	Swing 2010
1	1	Edinburgh South	Lab	Lib	0.47	Lib	0.36
2	3	Dundee East Ochil and South	SNP	Lab	0.48	Lab	2.245
3	12	Perthshire	Lab	SNP	0.74	SNP	5.14
4	6	Aberdeen South	Lab	Lib	1.62	Lib	4.07
5	10	Perth and North Perthshire Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale	SNP	Con	1.66	Con	4.535
6	11	Angus	Con	Lab	1.95	Lab	4.57
7	9	Edinburgh North and Leith	SNP	Con	2.10	Con	4.325
8	2	Dumfries and Galloway	Lab	Lib	2.52	Lib	1.82
9	20	Dunbartonshire East	Lab	Con	2.87	Con	7.135
10	4	Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey	Lib	Lab	4.35	Lab	2.28
11	25	Na h-Eileanan an Iar	Lib	Lab	4.69	Lab	9.31
12	16	Stirling	SNP	Lab	5.21	Lab	6.405
13	23	Glasgow North	Lab	Con	5.46	Con	8.93
14	17	Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk	Lab	Lib	5.98	Lib	6.58
15	15	Argyll and Bute	Lib	Con	6.50	Con	5.785
16	5	Renfrewshire East	Lib	Con	6.52	Con	3.79
17	27	Dundee West	Lab	Con	7.02	Con	10.175
18	26	Moray	Lab	SNP	7.28	SNP	9.805
19	18		SNP	Con	7.32	Con	6.82

20	33	Edinburgh East	Lab	Lib	7.81	SNP	11.515
21	24	Edinburgh South West	Lab	Con	8.24	Con	9.29
22	35	East Lothian	Lab	Lib	8.32	Con	12.47
23	7	Aberdeenshire West and Kincardine	Lib	Con	8.97	Con	4.08
24	30	Aberdeen North	Lab	Lib	9.27	SNP	11.09
25	36	Midlothian	Lab	Lib	9.63	SNP	13.185
26	37	Kilmarnock and Loudoun	Lab	SNP	9.80	SNP	13.295
27	29	Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock	Lab	Con	11.10	Con	10.8
28	34	Linlithgow and East Falkirk	Lab	SNP	12.07	SNP	12.2
29	38	Ayrshire Central	Lab	Con	12.16	Con	13.675
30	19	Gordon	Lib	Lab	12.41	SNP	6.915
31	28	Ayrshire North and Arran	Lab	Con	12.78	SNP	10.725
32	45	Paisley and Renfrewshire North	Lab	SNP	13.45	SNP	17.48
33	14	Dunfermline and West Fife	Lab	Lib	13.64	Lib	5.585
34	40	Lanark and Hamilton East	Lab	Lib	13.70	SNP	14.475
35	41	Glasgow South	Lab	Lib	14.09	SNP	15.785
36	50	Glenrothes	Lab	SNP	14.27	SNP	20.305
37	21	Falkirk	Lab	SNP	14.73	SNP	7.72
38	22	Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	Lib	Lab	14.76	Lab	8.39
39	31	Livingston	Lab	SNP	14.77	SNP	11.265
40	42	Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East	Lab	SNP	14.79	SNP	16.715
41	48	Glasgow North West	Lab	Lib	14.82	Lib	19.125
42	8	Edinburgh West	Lib	Con	15.02	Lab	4.095
43	51	Dunbartonshire West	Lab	SNP	15.09	SNP	20.595
44	43	Glasgow Central	Lab	Lib	15.21	SNP	17.25
45	39	East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow	Lab	SNP	15.42	SNP	14.235
46	49	Inverclyde	Lab	SNP	15.60	SNP	19.235
47	13	Banff and Buchan	SNP	Con	15.90	Con	5.235
48	32	Fife North East	Lib	Con	16.30	Con	11.295
49	52	Paisley and Renfrewshire South	Lab	Lib	17.47	SNP	20.77
50	59	Glasgow North East	Lab	SNP	17.83	SNP	27.105
51	54	Rutherglen and Hamilton West	Lab	Lib	18.62	SNP	22.35
52	58	Orkney and Shetland	Lib	Lab	18.68	Lab	25.66
53	53	Motherwell and Wishaw	Lab	SNP	20.51	SNP	21.475
54	44	Airdrie and Shotts	Lab	SNP	21.24	SNP	17.305
55	57	Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath	Lab	SNP	21.79	SNP	25.12
56	46	Glasgow East	Lab	SNP	21.83	SNP	18.405

57	47	Ross, Skye and Lochaber	Lib	Lab	21.90	Lab	18.76
58	55	Glasgow South West	Lab	SNP	22.43	SNP	23.08
59	56	Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill	Lab	SNP	25.45	SNP	24.875

A Catenaccio game

The 2010 election in Scotland appears to have been a defensive Catenaccio game though that may only be a retrospective impression rather than a strategy adopted by all or any party. At the Scotland-wide level, Labour was able to easily hold its own, but this also applied at individual constituency level. At the outset of the campaign, it was widely anticipated that the SNP would improve on its performance in 2005 and that a British-wide Conservative revival would pay dividends in Scotland. Labour and the Liberal Democrats were anticipated to be the main defenders.

The Scotland-wide pattern was evident in individual constituencies, with Labour's vote share up in 44 seats, the SNP's in 46, the Conservatives in 43, and Liberal Democrats in only nine seats. Under the surface, however, there were some intriguing results and a different pattern is evident in target seats. The general tendency was that the incumbent party improved its position regardless of which party was challenging, with the exception of the Liberal Democrats who did less well in all but three seats where they were incumbents though, crucially, two of the three were their most marginal seats. In large measure this is explained by the party's general decline, with its best chance of holding onto its share of the vote found in seats in which it was incumbent. David Mundell, the sole Tory incumbent, saw his majority increase. The SNP majority decreased in two of its six seats, the neighbouring seats of Moray and Banff & Buchan, the latter the seat vacated by Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, where the Conservative candidate was a local television celebrity. Banff & Buchan remains fairly

solid SNP territory, but there was a swing to the Conservatives of 10.7%. But in each of its other four seats, the SNP increased its share of the vote.

In Table 7, we have classified seats according to the swing required to win or lose. In some cases, the party that is in third place may be better placed to win than one in second place if, for example, there is evidence of a national swing in favour of the third party while the party in second place is falling back. The top row indicates the average swing achieved in seats by each of the parties where less than 5% was required to win following the 2005 result. There was one seat, Ochil and South Perthshire, in which the SNP was challenging Labour and vulnerable to under a 5% swing following 2005. In that seat, there was a swing of 4.4% to Labour. There was also only one seat, Dundee East, in which the SNP was incumbent and vulnerable to a swing of under 5% following 2005. In 2010, there was a swing to the SNP of 1.8%. The picture that emerges is of incumbents fighting off challenges and generally improving their position across the board. One consequence is that the Conservatives have an even greater challenge to win more seats than after 2005. After that election, two of the top 50 Conservative targets were in Scotland, requiring swings of 1.7% and 2.1%, but after 2010 the Conservatives best prospect in Scotland is number 60, requiring a swing of 3.8 %

7: Incumbents and challengers 2005-2010

	Party challenging/incumbent (N) and change in swing 2005-2010			
Challenger/Incumbent Swing required to win/lose % following 2005	Labour (N)	SNP (N)	LibDem (N)	Cons (N)
Challenger 0-4.99	-1.74 (4)	-4.4 (1)	-0.5 (3)	-2.8 (4)

Challenger 5-9.99	-1.95 (5)	-3 (2)	-4.1 (12)	-0.4 (10)
Challenger 10-19.99%	3.4 (8)	0 (39)	-3.5 (26)	0.2 (25)
Challenger 20+	3.1 (1)	1.5 (11)	3.1 (7)	-1 (19)
Incumbent 0-4.99	2.1 (5)	1.8 (1)	1.3 (2)	2.6 (1)
Incumbent 5-9.99	2.8 (10)	1.5 (4)	-2.8 (3)	(0)
Incumbent 10-19.99	1.3 (20)	-10.7 (1)	-4.2 (5)	(0)
Incumbent 20+	-0.5 (6)	(0)	-4.2 (5)	(0)
N	(59)	(59)	(59)	(59)

There is no obvious reason why this should have happened in Scotland. One possible explanation is that tactical voting generally favoured incumbency rather than favoured or undermined any particular party. It is, however, unclear why that should be the case unless the incumbent was a particularly well known and appealing figure. However, in some cases, the incumbent candidate stood down and it was the incumbent party that was the beneficiary. In Edinburgh South, Labour held the seat with a new candidate against a strong challenge from the Liberal Democrats. The former Labour MP stood down following revelations about his private life. It would appear that replacing candidates who might have damaged the party's performance, due to personal peccadilloes or embarrassing expense claims, proved a successful strategy.

Implications of the result for Government

The coalition has given the governing parties one more Scottish MP than the Conservatives had in 1992 when they last won an election (though 20% of seats rather

than 15% due to fewer Scottish seats than 18 years before). Although there is nothing unconstitutional in the Conservatives governing with only one Scottish seat, issues of legitimacy undermined Conservatives in the 1980s and 1990s and may well have returned had they attempted to govern without Liberal Democrat support.¹⁵ The Conservatives were committed to keeping the Scotland Office while the Liberal Democrats wanted it scrapped. Both were committed to the implementation of the Calman Report and David Cameron had emphasised his 'respect agenda' by which he meant that Conservative Government would respect the devolved institutions. The Agreement reached between the coalition partners and issued five days after the election included a commitment to implement Calman. Danny Alexander, Scottish Liberal Democrat MP and chief of staff to Nick Clegg, became Secretary of state for Scotland. Alexander became Chief Secretary to the Treasury following David Laws resignation and was replaced in his briefly-held job by Michael Moore, another Liberal Democrat MP. The Tories' sole Scottish MP became Under Secretary of State, having served as Shadow Scottish Secretary. The Liberal Democrats appeared to offer the Conservatives cover in governing Scotland.

As Margaret Thatcher hinted, the Conservative problem in Scotland was less to do with policies than with image. Governing with little support in Scotland created problems. Throughout the campaign and since David Cameron was elected leader, the Conservatives went to considerable lengths to convince voters that a Conservative Government would be sensitive to Scottish distinctiveness. Being in government affords the Conservatives an opportunity to demonstrate that they are sensitive to Scottish needs

and aspirations, but the context of a major fiscal crisis and the need for cuts presents challenges, especially for a party about whom the electorate has deep suspicions. Coalition may limit accusations that they govern without a Scottish mandate, but also means that credit for popular policies will have to be shared with or may simply be accredited to the Liberal Democrats.

Implications of the result for 2011

After the SNP's victory in 2007, that party's hierarchy misread its increase in support as evidence that it would make a significant breakthrough at the UK general election. This misreading had been encouraged by the result of the Glasgow East by-election two months after the Holyrood elections in 2007, when the SNP vote rose by 26% and gave the Nationalists their first by-election victory at Westminster in over a decade. However, the Glenrothes by-election in November 2008 was a major setback for the SNP. In a seat that the SNP had high hopes of winning, having won the nearest equivalent seat in Holyrood eighteen months before, the result was a major fillip for Gordon Brown, whose own seat lay adjacent to Glenrothes. In November 2009, Labour easily held another by-election, in Glasgow North East, after Michael Martin, former Labour MP and Speaker of the House of Commons, resigned. The Labour candidate won 59% of the vote and the SNP managed to win only 20 per cent, increasing its share of the vote by only 2.3 per cent. The SNP continued to do well in polls of Holyrood voting intentions but it was struggling to have an equivalent impact on Westminster voting intentions.

However, until a few months before the 2010 election, polls suggested that the SNP would increase its share of the vote significantly, if struggle to translate this into seats given how far behind it was in 2005. But the polls and profile of the SNP Government in Edinburgh contributed to a sense that the Nationalists would advance. The SNP failed to take account of accumulating evidence that the Scottish electorate distinguishes its electoral preferences in Holyrood and Westminster elections. Following the 2010 election, Labour may be tempted to make the same mistake and assume that its success in a Westminster election will translate into easy success in the Holyrood elections in 2011.

During the course of the election, some pollsters not only asked Scottish electors how they would vote on May 6th pending but also how they would vote in a Holyrood election. The context in which the polling took place seems likely to favour Labour over the SNP. Nonetheless, the SNP could take comfort from the Holyrood preferences expressed in these polls. Labour's 20 point lead over the SNP almost disappeared in both constituency and list voting intentions. A YouGov poll that showed Labour having a fifteen point lead over the SNP a few days before election day found the SNP three points ahead of Labour in constituency preferences for Holyrood and Labour one point ahead of the SNP in the Holyrood regional vote.¹⁶ Other polls taken during the election showed similar results.

While there is evidence that voters distinguish between Westminster and Holyrood elections, the outcome of Westminster elections is likely to have a greater impact on Holyrood elections more than vice versa. The UK election result means that Labour are able to contest next year's Scottish elections as an unambiguous opposition

party, without having to defend a record of public spending cuts that would have been near inevitable had Labour won the UK election. Labour's task of linking the SNP in government in Holyrood with the Conservatives (and Liberal Democrats) in government in London is made easier simply because each of Labour's opponents are in government and having to make unpopular decisions. Scottish Labour has also had a major morale boost and while the party lost the election in 2010 across Britain, it performed better than many commentators had expected across Britain and it did very well in Scotland. Consequently, it is less likely to suffer from the insularity that often comes with defeat.

Conclusion

The 2010 election was remarkable in Scotland in that no seats changed hands while the Conservatives gained 90 seats in England and five in Wales. Labour's position strengthened. This was a remarkable result. Part of the explanation lies in the enduring unpopularity of the Conservatives in Scotland. Voters may well have supported Labour so strongly as a consequence that the real prospect of a Conservative Government. The SNP looked less relevant in a contest that was more focused on the main Westminster parties than in recent years. The paradox of a more distinctively Scottish result following a more uniformly British campaign might therefore be explained but the hostility to the Conservatives north of the border.

The four party system at Holyrood looks more like a one and three parts party system at Westminster. Scottish Labour is in the enviable position of having no clear challenger at Westminster. Despite a poor election, the Liberal Democrats held onto all their seats and

remain challengers in a few key marginals. The Conservatives remain the outsiders – fourth in terms of share of the vote and number of seats. The key difference from previous occasions when a Conservative Prime Minister has been in power is that there is a coalition in government at Westminster and the key Scottish Ministerial office is held by a Liberal Democrat. Other differences are the existence of a Scottish Parliament and the difficult economic and fiscal context. However, the real test of David Cameron's premiership from a Scottish perspective is what his respect agenda amounts to in practice and how it is perceived north of the border. Cameron returned his party to the centre ground across Britain, detoxifying the brand. A more deep rooted toxic brand of Conservatism in Scotland remains. The Prime Minister's challenge lies in altering that brand in the more challenging context of government.

¹ D. Torrance, *We in Scotland: Thatcherism in a cold climate*, Birlinn, Year? 39.

² M. Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, HarperCollins, 1993, 618: .623.

³ M. Ashcroft, *Smell the coffee: a wake-up call for the Conservative Party*, Michael Ashcroft, 2005: 52.

⁴ Technically, one seat changed hands compared with 2005. Glasgow North East had been the Speaker's seat in 2005 and was won by Labour in 2010 but this was a traditionally safe Labour seat and Michael Martin, the former Speaker had been a Labour MP.

⁵ Tory Scottish target seats were Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale; West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine; Angus; Argyll and Bute; Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk; Dumfries and Galloway;

Edinburgh South; Edinburgh South West; Perth and North Perthshire; East Renfrewshire; and Stirling.
<http://news.scotsman.com/politics/SNP-39irrelevant39-at-Westminster.5907453.jp?>

⁶ *Scotsman*, 21 April, 2008.

⁷ William Miller, *The End of British Politics?*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981, p. 254.

⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/16_04_10_firstdebate.pdf, p.6

⁹ <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/opinions/2010CSOH56.html>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *A future fair for all*, Scottish Labour Manifesto 2010, Scottish Labour Party, 2010: 3:3.

¹³ <http://www.commissiononscottishdevolution.org.uk/>

¹⁴ BBC News 24 April 2010.

¹⁵ J. Mitchell, 'The Unfinished Business of Devolution', *Political Quarterly*, 77,.4, 2007: 465-474.

¹⁶ <http://www.today.yougov.co.uk/sites/today.yougov.co.uk/files/YG-Archives-Pol-ScottishScotsman-100504.pdf>